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FOLK-LORE OF THE CAROLINA MOUNTAINS.

THE mountaineer of western North Carolina belongs to a peculiar type which has been developed by environment and isolation into something distinctively American, and yet unlike anything to be found outside of the southern Alleghanies. Ever since his ancestors wrested this region from the aboriginal lords of the soil a century ago, and established themselves along the beautiful streams which pay tribute to the broad, rolling Tennessee, his life has been a continual struggle with adverse circumstances. In the old days befo' de wa' the great planter east of the Blue Ridge, with a thousand acres of cotton and half as many slaves, could well afford to live a life of luxurious ease, while his sons were at some aristocratic military institute, and his daughters in attendance at one of the innumerable select schools of the South. In the mountains, on the other hand, the very nature of the country made large farms out of the question, and cotton, rice, and sugar, the great money-making crops of the lowlands, could not be produced. Slavery was unprofitable, and the unfortunate owner of a narrow strip of bottom land, shut in on the one side by the mountain and continually washed away on the other by the river, found himself obliged to do his own work and keep his boys at home to help, while his girls stayed in the house to take turns with their mother at the spinning-wheel and the hoeecake. Corn was the only crop that could be raised to advantage, and even then he could not reach a market with his surplus for want of roads. The country was, and still is, undeveloped, and there were no other industries to take the place of farming, and although the schoolmaster might be abroad in more favored regions, he steered clear of the mountains. Under such a load of discouragements it is not to be wondered at that the mountain "tarheel" gradually drifted into a condition of dreary indifference to all things sublunary but hog and hominy, or the delights of a bear hunt and barbecue.

A few years ago he was in the condition of the Georgia youth who grew up on a farm within twenty miles of Augusta without ever in his life having been so far as that ancient city. On arriving at man's estate he resolved to celebrate the momentous event by a voyage of discovery, and accordingly, after bidding an affectionate farewell to all he loved best and dearest, he turned his back on familiar scenes and began making barefoot tracks along the old road that led to Augusta. One, two, three days passed, and at length the wanderer returned, footsore and weary, and withal wearing a dazed expression, like one just awakened from a dream. To a dozen anxious questions from father, mother, and the rest, he made no reply, but sat thought-

fully regarding the fire, with his face buried in his hands, until supper was ready. Under the grateful influence of fried bacon and corn pone, however, he gradually thawed out, and at last, drawing a long breath, looked round upon the group of expectant faces and summed up his experiences: "Well, if the world 's as big the other way as it is from here to 'Gusty, it 's a darned big thing !"

Before the late war few of the mountaineers had ever been out of their native mountains, or had any higher conception of a city than could be obtained from the collection of twenty or thirty frame houses, called the county town, which they occasionally visited on ceremonial occasions. Even now many of them have never seen a brick house or a railroad, and but dimly realize how such things can be. Illiteracy is the rule. The man who can write his own name is the exception, and the woman who can do as much is nothing less than a prodigy. It must be understood that these remarks apply to the mountaineer proper, and not to the inhabitants of the villages and small towns along the main roads passing through the country.

Living thus isolated, the mountaineer has little use for money, and produces at home almost everything that he requires, including his clothing, which the women still spin and weave on the old-fashioned wheels and looms of our grandmothers' days. His house is a log cabin, chinked with mud in the cracks, and generally consisting of two small rooms and a loft, the latter used as a sleeping room and reached by a ladder. The furniture consists chiefly of a home-made bed and table, a spinning-wheel, and a few split-bottom chairs, not to mention an old flint-lock rifle as tall as an ordinary man, and half a dozen or so of wild-eyed, white-headed children. For some unexplained reason the children invariably have white hair, just as the negro has wool and the Chinaman a pigtail.

At one end of the cabin is the chimney, built up on the outside with stone or logs crossed in cobhouse fashion, and plastered inside and out with clay. The fire is built up with a great pine backlog for a basis and smaller sticks piled up in front. At meal time a hole is scooped out in the coals for the pot, and another by its side for the old-fashioned Dutch oven, a sort of pot, having a lid made with a high rim in order to hold the coals which are heaped upon it. The corn-cake is placed in this pot, the lid put on and covered with live coals, and between the two fires the bread is soon baked. Corn bread, hominy, bacon, and black coffee make up the bill of fare. Wheaten bread is an unknown luxury, and anything that cannot be cooked in a pot or fried in a pan must go begging in the mountains.

In politics they are about equally divided between the two great parties. In religion they are Baptists and Methodists, of the shouting variety. Some of the Baptists were greatly surprised on being

told that their denominational brethren in other parts of the country did not meet at stated periods for the purpose of washing each other's feet, as these foot-washings are an important event in the Baptist calendar in the mountains. The great occasion of religious awakening is the "association," which takes place in the fall. This is a camp-meeting without the tents. Preachers and exhorters come from the neighboring villages, and the people come from all the country round, prepared to spend several days with their friends in the vicinity. The meetings are held in the open air, with the groves for temples and the everlasting hills for a background. Everybody is there, and devotion is at fever heat for a few days. It must be remembered that, in the absence of the theatre and the circus, the yearly association affords almost the only relief from the gray monotony of this lonely mountain life. Of late years Mormon missionaries from Utah have reaped a rich harvest in this region, and in parts of Swain and Haywood counties a peculiar sect, known as Castellites, has arisen, whose exercises seem to be of a highly emotional character, as it is a common remark that every one who joins the Castellites goes crazy.

The folk-lore notes here given were picked up incidentally while engaged on other work, and are but stray leaves of the volume which the industrious collector may yet gather among this primitive people, as yet unchanged by immigration and uncontaminated by the modern civilization.

The dialect is well marked. The *R*, instead of being elided, as is the case in other parts of the South, is sounded as distinctly as on the banks of the Wabash. Ginseng is *sang*, the service tree is *sarvice*, and peanuts are *goobers*. *Gwine* and *obleeged*, *tote* and *holp*, are universally used, and many words obsolete or almost unknown in other sections of the country are still retained here. Among these are *tolldish*, a measure equivalent to one fourth of a peck, and so called because this is the amount deducted as toll by the miller from a bushel of grain; and *poke*, a small wall sachel, generally used as a comb-bag, recalling to memory the old proverb about buying a pig in a poke.

When one is strong and brave he is said to be "much of a man," and when he feels sure that he will dislike a new acquaintance he knows in reason that he cain't neighbor him. Contrary to the general impression, such forms as *we-uns* and *you-uns* are not common in western North Carolina, at least upon the headwaters of the Tuckaseegee. "You-uns" was heard but once in the course of about eight months, and in discussing the subject with an intelligent gentleman at Webster, Captain James Terrell, he expressed the opinion that the proper home of "we-uns" was in upper Georgia. In support

of this view he instanced the case of a friend resident in that section, who had a bright little boy about six years old, who was very imitative and always anxious to show off before strangers. On one occasion one of the family, wishing to draw him out before a visitor, said to him, "Now, Johnny, tell us how they ask for an auger in Georgia." The little fellow had evidently heard and noted such a request, for quick as a flash came the response, "You-uns ain't got ary auger, ar' ye?"

On one occasion, while riding in company with a friend, we "met up with" a man who had just come from the railroad station a few miles away. My friend, who was expecting letters, asked if any mail had come. As an example of the emphatic negative the reply would be hard to match, — "There did n't come nary bit o' mail for nobody."

The sparseness of population and the roughness of the country prevent frequent gatherings for social enjoyment, and the result is seen in the scarcity of holiday customs and observances. The few which survive from earlier days are mainly love charms pertaining to May morning. The children still hang up their stockings in the chimney on Christmas Eve, but the Christmas-tree, introduced into this country by the Germans, is as yet unknown in the mountains. On the night or eve of "Old Christmas," January 6th, perhaps better known as Twelfth Night, the cattle in the stable kneel down and pray. One informant positively asserted the truth of this belief, because in order to test the matter she had once gone down to the stable on this night, and sure enough she found the cows kneeling on the ground and making "just the masterest moanin'." It is also said that whatever one does on New Year he will be doing all the year — but it is to be hoped that this is not intended in the literal sense.

If a young girl will pluck a white dogwood blossom and wear it in her bosom on May morning, the first man met wearing a white hat will have the Christian name of her future husband. Her handkerchief left out on the grass the previous eve will have his name written upon it in the morning, and from analogous beliefs in Ireland and elsewhere it is presumable that the writing is done by a snail crawling over it. If she will take a looking-glass to the spring on May morning, and, turning her back to the spring, look into the mirror, she will see the figure of her lover rise out of the water behind her. A child may be cured of the thrush by holding it up on May morning so that a ray of light from a crack may enter its mouth.

There seem to be but few beliefs in connection with the days of the week. The women say that if a dress be begun on Wednesday or Saturday it must be finished the same day, otherwise the maker will never live to wear it. It is wrong to sew on Sunday, unless the precaution be taken not to wear a thimble. It may be remarked here

that Friday, instead of Monday, is wash-day, the washing being done at the spring, and the clothes hung upon the bushes to dry.

The girls have a number of love charms in addition to those already mentioned, most of them being practised also in Europe on Hallow Eve, a celebration which appears to have dropped out from the mountain calendar. If an egg, placed in front of the fire by a young woman, be seen to *sweat blood*, it is a sign that she will succeed in winning the sweetheart she desires. By giving to a number of mistletoe leaves the names of her several suitors, and ranging them in line before the fire, she can test the affection of each sweetheart. The leaf which the heat causes to pop over nearest to where she is standing will indicate which lover is most sincere in his professions, and in the same way will be shown the relative ardor of the others. If a girl will take out the yolk from a hard boiled egg, fill the cavity with salt, then eat the egg and go to bed, her destined husband will appear in the night and offer her a drink. Another way is to eat a mixture of a thimbleful of meal and another of salt, and then, being careful always to observe a strict silence, walk backwards to bed with the hands clasped behind the back, take off the clothing backwards, and get into bed. The apparition of the future husband will come as before and give her a drink of water.

Liverwort is known by the appropriate name of "heart leaf," and the peculiar shape of its leaves has suggested their use as a love philter. A girl can infallibly win the love of any sweetheart she may desire by secretly throwing over his clothing some of the powder made by rubbing together a few heart leaves which have been dried before the fire. She may, if she wish, have a score of lovers by simply carrying the leaves in her bosom. It is to be presumed that the recipe would be equally efficacious if used by one of the opposite sex.

There are doubtless a number of astronomic and meteorologic beliefs, although but few were noted. Crops of corn must be planted with a growing moon, but shingles must be nailed on the roof when the moon is on the wane, as otherwise they will warp upward at the edges. It is a bad omen to see the new moon through bushes or the branches of a tree. On one occasion the writer heard a man say, while looking up at the moon, —

"I see the moon and the moon sees me."

This was all he knew, but it is part of an old couplet well known in Ireland, the other line of which runs thus, —

"God bless the moon and God bless me."

It is said that the cattle will not go to sleep in the springtime with a full belly until the Seven Stars (the Pleiades) set at nightfall. A

sun shower is caused by the devil whipping his wife, the raindrops presumably being her tears. Feathers and dogs draw the lightning, and one must keep away from a feather-bed during a thunder-storm and drive the dog out of the house.

Cats suck the breath from sleeping persons. It is unlucky to take one from a house, and it bodes ill fortune to a child when the cat appears to be unusually attached to it. When a dog lies with his eyes looking out the door it is a sign that a friend will die within the year. It is a bad omen to meet a squirrel, but a good sign for a flock of birds to fly past.

The rabbit's foot is esteemed a powerful talisman to bring good fortune to the wearer and protect him from all danger. As this belief is more or less common throughout the South, it may be well to state how the charm is prepared, for the benefit of those who wish to be put on the royal road to health, wealth, and prosperity. It must be the left hind foot of a graveyard rabbit, *i. e.*, one caught in a graveyard, although one captured under the gallows would probably answer as well.¹ It must be taken at the midnight hour, the foot amputated, and the rabbit released, if not killed in the capture. The foot must then be carried secretly in the pocket until by chance the owner happens upon a hollow stump in which water has collected from recent rains. The foot is then dipped (three times ?) into this water and the charm is complete. Among the negroes and the uneducated whites of the South the reputed possessor of this potent talisman is at once feared and respected. The phenomenal success of General Fitzhugh Lee of Virginia in his gubernatorial race was attributed by the negroes to the fact that he carried a rabbit's foot and a bottle of stump water. A rabbit's foot was also sent to President Cleveland, together with other fetiches, by a Texas admirer, at the outset of his administration.

There are quite a number of beliefs and omens in connection with birds. If quails fly up in front of a man when on his way to consummate a bargain he will do well to abandon the trade. When a rooster crows in at the door it is a sign that a visitor is coming, in Carolina as well as in Europe. If one hear the first dove of the year above

¹ An account of a late execution in Georgia, taken from the *Atlanta Constitution* of date about February 8, 1889, begins thus: "A man hanging in mid-air, writhing in the agonies of death, 3,000 people scattered over the hill-sides and safely ensconced in the top of trees, a thousand men and boys chasing a rabbit scared nearly to death, yelling, laughing, screeching as they run, is a picture few people ever see. And yet it was one presented in Cobb County to-day." The rabbit had been scared out from a bush just as the drop fell. It was finally captured, and "Judge Winn offered the boy five dollars for one of the feet, but the offer was declined." What a picture of unfeeling barbarism and superstition in this Christian year of grace !

him — that is, on a tree or up the mountain — he will be prosperous at the year's end ; if below him, his own course will be constantly down hill. When one sees a redbird he will also see his sweetheart before the day is over. The belief that the jay brought the first earth with which the world was made, found among the Louisiana negroes, is known also in these mountains, but does not seem to have originated with the whites.¹ If a "stranger fly" should fly through the house it forebodes misfortune.

When a hole burns in your dress some one is talking bad of you. If the hole be in front the evil has just been spoken ; if behind or at the side the words were said some time ago. It is lucky to dream of finding money, provided the coins are larger than a dime ; otherwise it is a bad sign. To dream of snakes means that one has an enemy ; to dream of a death is a sign of a wedding, and vice versa. These interpretations are in accordance with the regular folk-lore code. It is lucky to put on a dress, a stocking, or any article of clothing wrong side out, provided one does it by accident and does not turn it again. Some one else may be got, however, to take it off and put it on again in the right way.

There are a number of beliefs pertaining to the every-day affairs of the household. Every woman knows that a piece of silver put into the churn will bring the butter, and she is equally well aware that the dirt must be swept into the fire, and never out at the door, as that would be sweeping away the luck of the house. Fire taken from one house must not be put with that on the hearth of another or the families will quarrel. Sassafras or black locust must never be burned, and the stick used to stir the soft soap in the kettle should always be of pine or sassafras. One should never carry a spade or a hoe on his shoulder through a doorway ; or if he happen to do so by accident he must go back the same way, otherwise he will be buried before a year passes. In Ireland, carrying anything on the shoulder through a doorway will stunt the growth of a child.

There are no fairies in the mountains, and the "good people" probably never crossed the salt ocean in any considerable number, but the belief in ghosts and witches is general, and many are the stories told of apparitions and conjurings. In one instance within the writer's knowledge a woman whose husband had recently died sought the services of a reputed wizard to raise the spirit of the dead man in order that she might learn where he had concealed his money. The man applied to felt himself unequal to the occasion, although claiming to have occult powers, but being anxious to earn the liberal sum offered by the woman, he came to consult the writer about the matter, and thus the secret leaked out.

¹ See the author's note on "The Negro Genesis" in the *American Anthropologist*, i. 230, Washington, July, 1888.

Medical charms are held in great esteem here as elsewhere, but most of them are already well known to the students of folk-lore, and therefore need not be described. The man just referred to was generally regarded as a doctor, and was said to be acquainted with the virtues of all the common herbs, as was probably the case, but in addition to this he claimed the power to cure diseases by the laying on of hands. In his demeanor toward others he was usually reserved and rather mysterious, but on discovering that the writer had given some attention to these subjects, he became more friendly and finally quite confidential. On one occasion he described in detail his method of curing by the touch. The patient is stretched out on the bed, suffering, let us suppose, from rheumatism. The doctor approaches and lays both hands, palms downward, upon the breast of the sick man. He then draws his hands slowly down along the body of the patient, and repeats the operation until he feels the disease enter at the tips of his own fingers, then mount gradually into his arms, and so pass into his body. At first he can shake off the disease current from his fingers, as one shakes drops of water from the hand, but as it becomes stronger it fills his whole body and thrills every nerve, until at last he can endure it no longer, but must rush out of the house to the nearest stream, — which in this country is never very far away, — and there washes off the deadly influence by repeated ablutions. According to his own statement, the ordeal always left him in an exhausted condition, and it seemed as if he himself really had faith in the operation.

The contagion of witchcraft is believed to be checked by burning the thing first affected. One lady mentioned an instance near Asheville, within her own or her mother's recollection, where a valuable steer suddenly became sick without apparent cause, and the fact was attributed to witchcraft. The owner and his neighbors collected a pile of logs, laid the sick animal upon it while still alive, and burned it to ashes. The same practice existed in England and in Scotland, in both of which countries cattle have been thus sacrificed to stop the murrain,¹ while in Ireland for the same purpose the part first affected is cut from the body of the dead animal and hung up to smoke in the chimney,² while in Vermont within comparatively recent years the dead body of a consumptive has been disinterred and the heart taken out and burned, to prevent the recurrence of the disease.³ From some such idea probably arose the practice of burning witches,

¹ Grimm, J., *Deutsche Mythologie*, i. 580 passim, 3d ed., Goettingen, 1854.

² See the author's "Medical Mythology of Ireland," in *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, xxiv. No. 125, p. 161, Philadelphia, 1887.

³ See the author's "Funeral Customs of Ireland," in *idem*. xxv. No. 128, p. 267, Philadelphia, 1888.

instead of disposing of them by the simpler method of beheading or hanging.

The riddles told around the fireside, like those current among the peasantry of Europe, are generally in rhyme. The following are specimens, and may perhaps be found in other parts of the country : —

“ It can run and can’t walk,
It has a tongue and can’t talk.”

Answer : A wagon.

“ East and west and north and south,
Ten thousand teeth and never a mouth.”

Answer : A card, for carding wool.

“ Hippy, tippy, up stairs,
Hippy, tippy, down stairs,
If you go near hippy tippy, he ’ll bite you.”

Answer : A hornet.

The next is undoubtedly very old and of English origin. It is well known in Ireland, where there are several forms, and also a Gaelic version. It is one of the narrative order, of which perhaps the oldest specimen is found in the story of Samson, in which a knowledge of the story is necessary to a correct solution. The story is that of a girl who had been persuaded by a false lover to meet him by appointment in a lonely wood at a certain hour at night, his object being robbery and murder. Arriving shortly before the appointed time, she climbed a tree in order to be out of the reach of wild beasts. In a few moments the pretended lover arrived, with a companion, and the poor girl was almost frozen with horror at seeing the two proceed to dig a grave for their intended victim. After waiting some time for her to make her appearance, the two murderers finally went away, and the girl, coming down from the tree, managed to drag herself home. The next day the man came to upbraid her for not keeping the appointment, when she told the story in the following riddle, the result being that he was taken and executed :—

“ Riddle me, riddle me right,
Guess where I was last Friday night ?
The bough did bend, my heart did quake,
When I saw the hole the fox did make.”

The children have but few song games, or indeed games of any kind, owing to the fact that families live far apart, and there are no schools — excepting in the larger villages — where the children can come together. One song of this kind was obtained from a lady living on Oconaluftee river, who had sung it when a child at her old home near Murphy, in the extreme southwestern corner of the State.

The writer had previously heard a portion of it in Washington from some children whose parents had come from the neighborhood of Cleveland in East Tennessee. It is proper to state here that most, if not all, of the beliefs and customs noted in this paper are known also in the adjacent region west of the Smoky Mountains. The lady had forgotten the details of the game, but remembered that one girl, presumably the "pretty little pink," stood in the centre, while the others marched around her singing the song. She said it had a very pretty tune, which she had forgotten, but on coming into the house unexpectedly one afternoon the writer surprised her singing it in a rich, clear voice to the familiar old air of "The Girl I Left Behind Me." The allusion to the Mexican war makes it at least forty years old, and the glowing description of the country brings to mind the glorious prospects of "revelling in the halls of the Montezumas" held out to the volunteers of that period. The lady stated, however, that as she had known it the children said "Quebec town" instead of "Mexico," which might indicate that the first part of the song goes back as far as the French and Indian war. Here it is :—

My pretty little pink, I once did think
That you and I would marry,
But now I've lost all hopes of that,
I can no longer tarry.
I've got my knapsack on my back,
My musket on my shoulder,
To march away to Mexico,
To be a gallant soldier.
Where coffee grows on a white oak tree,
And the rivers flow with brandy,
Where the boys are like a lump of gold
And the girls as sweet as candy.

James Mooney.